

The Science of Decision Making: Connecting People and Policy

Testing Tobacco Ad Restriction and Counter ads in a 3D Virtual Retail Store (Project 2)

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Abstract:

The tobacco industry spends the majority of its \$8 billion advertising expenditure promoting cigarettes at the point of sale (POS). Tobacco products are prominently displayed in retail stores at the point of sale exposing all customers to them. Studies show that youth who are exposed to retail tobacco marketing are more likely to experiment with smoking and to become smokers. Tobacco ads and displays also influence adults to purchase cigarettes when they had not planned to, which may make it harder for smokers to quit. The 2009 Family Smoking Prevention and Tobacco Control Act gives states and local governments the authority to regulate the time, place, and manner of cigarette advertising. Currently FDA does not regulate the promotion or sale of electronic cigarettes. Further, little is known about how electronic cigarette displays and promotions may influence consumer behaviors. In our research, we will develop a virtual convenience store (RTI iShoppe) to test policy options to curb and counter the influence of POS cigarette advertising and pack displays. We will also examine how regulating electronic cigarette promotions and displays may influence behavior.

We will conduct a series of randomized controlled experiments to test the following policy options:

- 1) Virtual store conditions in which the tobacco product displays behind the checkout counters are banned
- 2) Virtual store conditions in which tobacco price promotions are banned
- 3) Virtual store conditions in which graphic health warning signs are posted near checkout counters
- 4) Virtual store conditions in which e-cigarette promotions and/or displays are banned.

Youth (aged 13 to 17) current smokers and susceptible never smokers and adult (aged 18 or older) current smokers and recent (past 12 months) quitters will be recruited to participate in the study. Each participant will be randomized to one of the virtual store conditions and given up to 10 minutes to complete a shopping task in the virtual store. We will capture data on participants' activity in the store, including whether they attempted to purchase tobacco or electronic cigarette products. Participants will then complete a post shopping task survey. Key outcomes are tobacco purchase attempts (youth and adults), perceived ease of access to cigarettes (youth), perceived prevalence of peer smoking (youth), and urge to smoke (adults). The proposed research will provide policy-relevant data on the potential impact of restricting and countering tobacco and electronic cigarette displays and promotions at the POS on youth and adult smoking outcomes.